

The Academic Importance of the Arts in Fostering Belonging

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Abstract : A sense of belonging is the ability for individuals to feel they are a necessary part of whatever organization or community they find themselves in. In an academic setting, a sense of belonging is key to a student's success. The collected research points to this sense of belonging in academic settings as a significant contributor of students' levels of engagement and trust. When universities leverage the arts, students are provided with more opportunities to engage and feel confident in their surroundings. This allows for greater potential to develop within academic and social settings. The arts also call for the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion by showcasing works of artists from all different backgrounds, thus allowing students to gain cultural knowledge and be able to embrace differences. Equity, diversity, and inclusion are all emotional facets of belonging. Equity relates to the concept of making the conscious choice to recognize opportunities to incorporate inclusive and diverse ideals into different thought processes and collaboration. Inclusion involves providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people of all 'ingroups. In an inclusive culture, individuals are able to maximize their potential with the confidence they have gained through an accepting environment. A variety of members in academic communities have noted it may be beneficial to make certain events surrounding the arts to be built into course requirements in order to ensure students are expanding their horizons and exposing themselves to the arts. These academics also recommend incorporating the arts into extracurricular activities, such as Greek life, in order to appeal to large groups of students. Once students have an understanding of the rich knowledge cultivated through exploring the arts, they will feel more comfortable in their surroundings and thus more confident to become involved in other areas of their university. A number of universities, including West Chester and Carnegie Mellon, have instituted programs aiming to provide students with the necessary tools and resources to feel comfortable in their educational settings. Different programs include references to hotlines for discrimination and office for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Staff members have also been provided with means of combating biases and increasing feelings of belongingness in order to properly support and communicate with students. These tools have successfully allowed universities to foster inviting environments for students of all backgrounds to feel belong as well as strengthening the community's diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through demonstrating concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion by introducing the arts into learning spaces, students can find a sense of belonging within their academic environments. It is essential to understand these topics and how they work together to achieve a common goal. The efforts of universities have made much progress in shedding light on different cultures and ideas to show students their full potential and opportunities. Once students feel more comfortable within their organizations, engagement will increase substantially.

Keywords : arts, belonging, engagement, inclusion

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